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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: THIRD 2008 ENTREPRENEURS' PROTEST NO CHARM

REF: A. MINSK 042
[1](#)B. MINSK 063
[1](#)C. MINSK 017
[1](#)D. MINSK 030

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The two main organizers promoting Belarusian entrepreneurs' protests recently split over whether to support a demonstration on February 18. In any case, neither figure foresees the government compromising in the near term. While the regime appears willing to allow the leaders and their organizations to exist, the GOB may still employ repression in the run up to February 18 to ensure that the protest stays small. End summary.

Perspektiva NGO Opts Out of Upcoming Protest

[1](#)2. (C) On February 6, the leader of the NGO "Perspektiva," Anatoliy Shumchenko, confirmed to Deputy Pol/Econ Chief that his organization will not support calls for entrepreneurs to demonstrate on October Square in central Minsk February 18. Shumchenko said he based his decision on concerns over a reduced turnout and fears that authorities would once again forcibly disperse protestors. Perspektiva would instead ask entrepreneurs and their supporters to join the opposition's traditional march on the March 25 anniversary of the founding of the Belarusian National Republic in 1918.

Competitor Carries on with Plans for February 18

[1](#)3. (C) In contrast, the leader of the campaign "For Free Development of Entrepreneurship" Viktor Gorbachev said he and his supporters would turn out on February 18, as well as March 25. He participated in a February 7 press conference to draw attention to the upcoming event. Gorbachev seemed unconcerned by Shumchenko's decision, and told Deputy Pol/Econ Chief that "For Free Development of Entrepreneurship" recruited 95 percent of those at the last protest (ref A).

Compromise Not Near at Hand

[1](#)4. (C) While disagreeing on tactics, both Gorbachev and Shumchenko thought that the GOB would not back down on Presidential Order 760 in the near term. Gorbachev thought the government would wait until closer to the summer to make concessions so that the public would not draw the conclusion that the protests produced a positive result.

Pressure on Leaders Down, but Middle Ranks Still at Risk

15. (C) Shumchenko said that authorities said they made a mistake earlier when they threatened to close down Perspektiva. Gorbachev also stated that the regime moderated its stance toward him. He says he received official notification of an event billed as dialogue between the regime and small- and medium-sized businesses (ref B), and was allowed to send a representative. He complained, however, that jail time after the last demonstrations meant financial hardship for regional representatives. He also feared two or three participants from the last demonstration might face criminal charges in order to intimidate potential participants in the February 18 protest.

Comment: Early Elements of Successful Protests Fading Fast

16. (C) The surprising success of the initial entrepreneurs' demonstration this year (refs C and D) rested upon uncommon cooperation among rival organizers of entrepreneurs, real hopes the regime would seek to compromise and spreading information on the protests by word of mouth in markets. Unfortunately, it appears unlikely these factors will once again come together by February 18.

STEWART